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HAS KING DAVID'S PALACE IN JERUSALEM BEEN FOUND?

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Abstract

Recent excavations at the City of David have revealed a set of massive walls constructed of large undressed stones. Excavator Eilat Mazar has presented them as the remains of a single building, which she labelled the 'Large Stone Structure'. Mazar interpreted the 'Large Stone Structure' as part of a big construction complex, which had also included the 'Stepped Stone Structure' on the slope. She dated her 'Large Stone Structure' to ca. 1000 BCE and identified it as the palace of King David. We argue that: (1) the walls unearthed by Mazar do not belong to a single building; (2) the more elaborate walls may be associated with elements uncovered by Macalister and Duncan in the 1920s and should possibly be dated to the Hellenistic period; (3) the 'Stepped Stone Structure' represents at least two phases of construction— the lower (downslope) and earlier, possibly dating to the Iron IIA in the 9th century BCE, and the later (which connects to the Hasmonaean First Wall upslope) dating to the Hellenistic period.

Recent excavations at the City of David, the site where biblical Jerusalem was founded, have revealed the remains of a set of massive walls constructed of large undressed stones. The excavator, Eilat Mazar, has presented them as the remains of a single, substantial building, which she has labelled the 'Large Stone Structure' (E. Mazar 2006a; 2006b; 2007). Mazar dated her 'Large Stone Structure' to ca. 1000 BCE and, inspired by the ideas of the late Benjamin Mazar (E. Mazar 2006a: 20), identified it as the palace of King David. Eilat Mazar's archaeological, chronological and, in fact, historical conclusions have unreservedly been endorsed by Amihai Mazar (2006: 269–270). The ostensible importance of this discovery and the media frenzy that has accompanied the excavation demand immediate discussion, which is based on the preliminary publications and on our own observations made during our visits to the site in both excavation seasons.¹

¹ We are grateful to Dr. Mazar for her hospitality and thorough explanations during our visits following the 2005 season and toward the end of the 2007 season. We also wish to thank her for permission to publish the illustrations on pages 146 and 156.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Eilat Mazar's excavation field, which in 2005 covered an area of ca. 25×9 –14 m, is located on the crest of the City of David ridge, directly to the west of Shiloh's Area G. This field (and the adjoining eastern slope of the ridge) has been explored extensively. It falls within the northern side of Macalister and Duncan's Field No. 5 (Macalister and Duncan 1926: map in back pocket). Macalister and Duncan exposed most of the area down to bedrock, including several cisterns and a rock-cut 'olive press' (*ibid.*: Pl. I, compare also the photograph *ibid.*: Fig. 20 with E. Mazar 2007: photograph on p. 31). They also uncovered the 'Jebusite Ramp' along the upper edge of the eastern slope (Macalister and Duncan 1926: Pl. V), commonly known today as the 'Stepped Stone Structure', as well as the two towers adjacent to the ramp—the southern, 'Great Tower', which they attributed to the 'Early Hebrew period', and the northern 'Maccabean Tower' (*ibid.*: map in back pocket). This fortification system has been widely identified as part of the late Hellenistic, Hasmonaean First Wall of Jerusalem (e.g., Geva 2003: 529–534; Wightman 1993: 88–94).

In the 1960s the area was explored by Kenyon (for the final report see Steiner 2001). On the eastern slope (in her Area A, with Sub-areas A/I–A/XVIII) Kenyon exposed parts of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' with domestic units built over it, and investigated the set of the underlying terraces. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Shiloh continued the exploration of the eastern slope (his Area G—Shiloh 1984; for additional data on Shiloh's excavations see Cahill 2003), studying, in the main, the same structures dealt with by Kenyon and their extensions.

The extensive exploration of the site, and the fact that certain areas were later back-filled, have affected the state of preservation of the ancient buildings. Modern restorations and additions are also evident. In the case of the southern tower this can easily be traced by comparing Macalister and Duncan's photographs (1926: Fig. 46) with what currently exists. Shiloh described a massive revetment that supports the northern tower as a "modern retaining wall" (No. 6 in Shiloh 1984: Pl. 27: 1), and Steiner noted that "Part of the northern ramp had been restored with cement by the Department of Antiquities of Palestine" (2001: 51).

THE FINDS ACCORDING TO EILAT MAZAR

Eilat Mazar did not present the various elements in her excavation according to numbered strata; rather, she referred to them in terms of labels (e.g., the 'earth accumulation', the 'Large Stone Structure') and periods. In what follows we summarize her finds from bedrock to the Byzantine period (see E. Mazar 2007 in general; photograph *ibid.*: 31 for the stratigraphy of the first four elements):

- In several spots, the excavation reached bedrock with rock-cut cupmarks that were dated to the Chalcolithic period.
- Next there is a whitish, 'leveled surface' that fills crevices in the bedrock and creates a flattened surface with plots of even bedrock. It was dated between the Chalcolithic period (the cupmarks below it) and the Middle Bronze Age (the earliest pottery in the layer above it—see below). Mazar (2006b: 12; 2006d: 21) suggested that in one place the area had been flattened in order to prepare for activity in the next phase.
- Atop the whitish 'leveled surface' lies the 'brown earth accumulation'. Pictures published thus far show its thickness to range between ca. 10 cm and a few dozen cm. A large number of pottery sherds dating to the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and the Iron I was found in it. Mazar compared the Iron I sherds from this layer to the Giloh and Shiloh V assemblages (E. Mazar 2006b: 11–12). She interpreted the 'brown earth accumulation' as an accumulated layer of debris representing centuries of activity in an open space (E. Mazar 2006b: 11; 2007: 48), located outside the limit of the second millennium city. Following Macalister and Duncan (1926: 15), she believes that the Bronze Age city was situated further to the south on the ridge of the City of David (E. Mazar 2006b: 12; 2006d; 2007: 16–17, 28, 52).
- A number of massive walls constructed of large stone blocks were built over the 'brown earth accumulation'. Mazar interpreted these walls as belonging to a single building which she labelled the 'Large Stone Structure' (Fig. 1). According to her the main wall of this building (Wall 107), described as "slightly curved", runs from west to east and is 28.4 m long and 2.50–3.00 m wide. Walls oriented perpendicularly to Wall 107 and bonded to it were unearthed along its southern side. The walls found on the northern side of the excavated area adjoin Wall 107 but are not bonded to it. Mazar (2006b: 12–13; 2007: 60) argued that the latter walls belong to a later phase of construction of the 'Large Stone Structure'. The eastern wall of Mazar's 'Large Stone Structure' (Wall 20) runs along the eastern edge of the crest of the ridge, above the steep slope, immediately to the west of the 'Stepped Stone Structure'. Macalister and Duncan's northern 'Maccabean Tower' adjoins the outer, eastern side of Wall 20. No floor levels related to the 'Large Stone Structure' have been uncovered. Fragments of several Iron IIA vessels were found in a narrow slot between walls in the northeastern sector of the excavation area (Locus 47).

Mazar dated the construction of the original building to ca. 1000 BCE (2007: 17–18, 63; see also A. Mazar 2006: 269–270) and identified it with the palace

that, according to 2 Samuel 5: 11, the Phoenicians built for King David. She interpreted the additions on the northern side of the building as a reinforcement carried out prior to Pharaoh Shishak's attack on Jerusalem (2007: 61–62; for the foundations of Mazar's dating see below).

- According to Mazar, the 'Large Stone Structure' continued to be in use during Iron Age IIB, until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (E. Mazar 2007: 67). Iron IIB pottery was found in two locations (Loci 39 and 47), both not connected to floors. No remains were assigned to the Persian period.
- The city-wall built on top of the eastern slope and the two towers adjoining it are late Hellenistic in date and should be identified with the Hasmonaeen fortification (2007: 71). This includes the segment of the city wall to the north of the northern tower, which Kenyon identified (1974: 191) with the fortifications built by Nehemiah. According to this view, Wall 20, which marks the eastern limit of the 'Large Stone Structure', was reused by the Hasmonaeans in their fortification system (E. Mazar 2007: plan on p. 73). Among the remains of the 'Second Temple Period', Mazar describes a cistern with two compartments and a stone-built arched roof, first exposed by Macalister and Duncan (1926: 93–96, Fig. 80). According to her observation, an "arched cistern is located at the western end of our excavation area, its arch having been built into W107 of the Large Stone Structure.... The impression already received is that the cistern was hewn in the earliest stages of human activity in this area. Once the Large Stone Structure was built (... The Iron Age IIA) *the cistern was incorporated into the structure*, and would subsequently be used continuously in the preceding [*sic!*] periods of activity" (E. Mazar 2007: 73, our emphasis). A ritual bath (*mikveh*), first exposed by Macalister and Duncan (1926: Pl. VI), is also attributed by Mazar (2007: 75) to the Hasmonaeen period on the basis of coins of Alexander Jannaeus discovered within its walls. The ritual bath did not cut any of the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure'.
- An Early Roman (Herodian) vaulted chamber was built over and into the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' (E. Mazar 2007: photograph on p. 74).
- All the remains described above were sealed by the so-called House of Eusebius, which extended over a large part of the area; it was excavated by Macalister and Duncan (1926: 105–119) and now partially by Mazar (2006a: 23; 2007: 77).

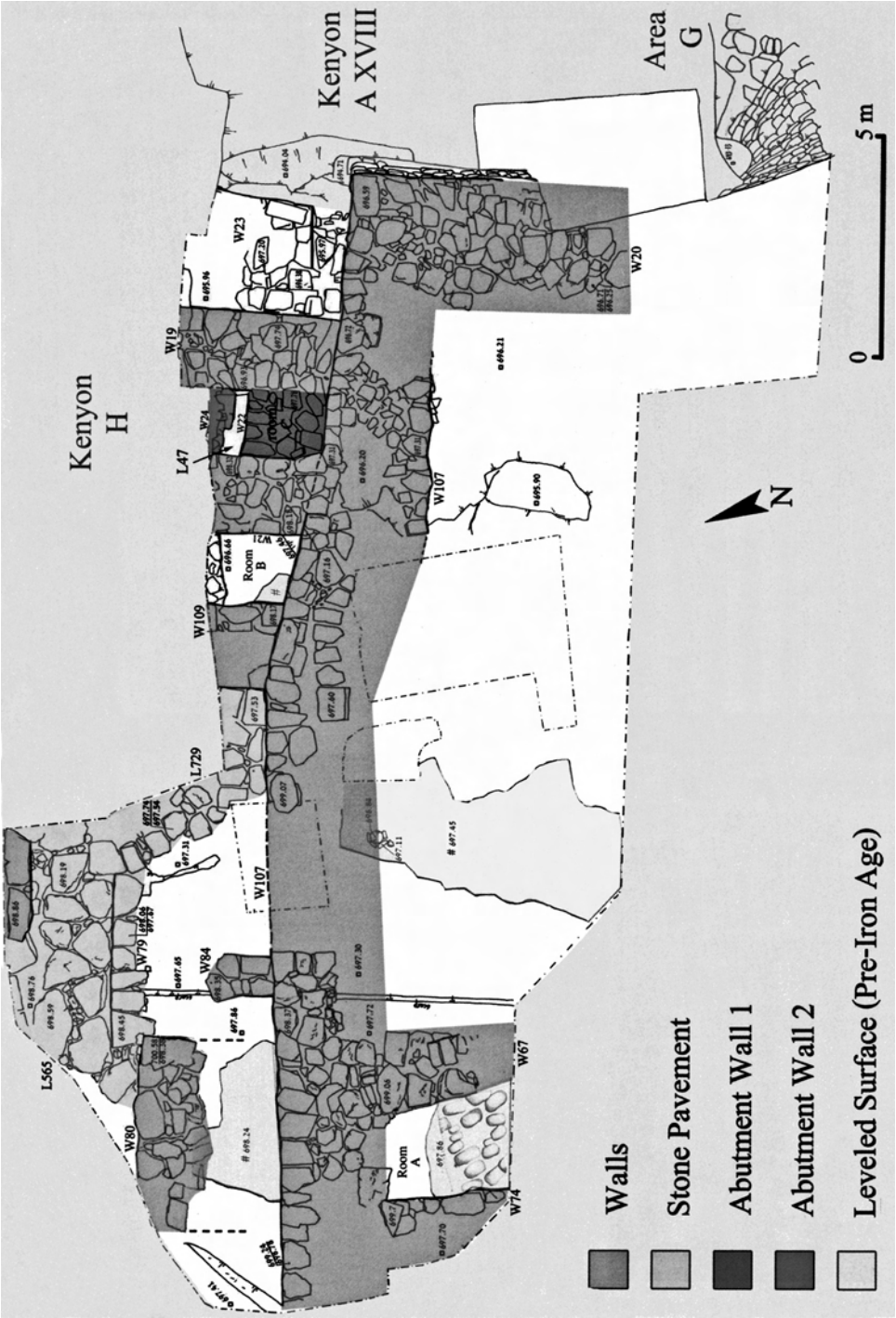


Fig. 1. Plan of the 'Large Stone Structure' (courtesy of E. Mazar; after E. Mazar 2007: 59).

THE FINDS: AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Below the 'Large Stone Structure'

Eilat Mazar dated the cupmarks in the bedrock on the basis of their similarity to cupmarks at other Chalcolithic sites, as well as the discovery of Chalcolithic sherds by Shiloh and by Reich and Shukron in their excavations on the eastern slope (E. Mazar 2007: 21–22). It seems, however, that the earliest sherds found by Mazar in this specific area date to the Early Bronze Age (E. Mazar 2007: 23). Therefore, although the dating of the cupmarks to the Chalcolithic period is possible, it is not the only possibility.

The whitish 'leveled surface', which had been laid in order to flatten the area, did not yield pottery (E. Mazar 2006d: 21; 2007: 29–30). It was dated between the Chalcolithic period (the cupmarks in the bedrock) and the Middle Bronze (the earliest pottery in the overlying 'brown earth accumulation'—E. Mazar 2007: 20–21). The latter argument holds only if the 'brown earth accumulation' indeed represents an accumulation of *in situ* activity rather than a fill, or a make-up for construction (see below).

The 'brown earth accumulation' discovered beneath the walls assigned to the 'Large Stone Structure' yielded Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and Iron I pottery. Mazar interpreted this layer as representing long-term activity in the second millennium BCE in an open space outside the city (E. Mazar 2006b: 11; 2007: 48). Accordingly, she argues (following Macalister and Duncan 1926: 15) that the Middle Bronze Age settlement was located further to the south on the ridge of the City of David (E. Mazar 2006b: 12; 2006d: 22, Fig. on p. 26; 2007: 16–17, 28, 52). We find both suggestions difficult to accept.

The 'brown earth accumulation' seems to be too thin for an accumulation of several centuries. This observation and the lack of inner stratification suggest that it could have been laid here as a fill or a make-up for construction. In other words, it could have been brought here from another location.

The idea that the Middle Bronze fortified settlement was restricted to the southern part of the ridge is ostensibly based on Macalister and Duncan's assumption that a depression ran in this place, oriented from east to west across the ridge, which they labelled the "Zedek Valley" (Macalister and Duncan 1926: 15). Yet, 'Rock Scarp A' (1926: Fig. 39 and Pl. I)—probably the reason for this theory—seems to be no more than an ancient quarry. Indeed, Kenyon indicated the obvious—that the bedrock along the crest of the ridge rises toward the north (Steiner 2001: Fig. 4.18).² Mazar's

² Finkelstein and Herzog find it difficult to accept that a fortified Middle Bronze stronghold was constructed on a slope, dominated by the higher ground on the continuation of the ridge to the north.

theory seems to have been affected by her own interpretation of the biblical verses rather than based on factual data (see discussion below).

Regarding the time when the 'brown earth accumulation' was laid in this spot, the latest sherds found in it were compared by Mazar to the pottery of Giloh and Shiloh V (E. Mazar 2006b: 11–12; early and middle Iron I respectively—see Finkelstein and Piasezky 2006). The published drawings (E. Mazar 2007: 50) show only cooking-pots with everted rims in the Late Bronze tradition. But the accompanying picture (*ibid.*: 47) shows cooking-pots with erect rims as well, and at least one rim which seems to date to the late Iron I or early Iron IIA; this was also our impression when Mazar showed us selected sherds from this layer during a visit to the site. Indeed, in one place Mazar (2006a: 25) acknowledges that the latest Iron I sherds from the 'brown earth accumulation' date to the very end of the Iron I. In low chronology terms this means the 10th century BCE.

Two olive pits and one bone from the 'brown earth accumulation' were radiocarbon dated (E. Mazar 2007: 49). One olive pit was measured 3545 ± 50 BP, which gives a calibrated 1σ date of 1950–1770 BCE. The bone was measured 2960 ± 50 BP, which translates into a 1σ calibrated date of 1270–1080 BCE. The second olive pit from this layer was radiocarbon dated to 2780 ± 50 BP, which provides a 1σ calibrated date of 1000–890 BCE (58.9%), or 870–840 (9.3%). The latter sample translates into the late Iron I to late Iron IIA in low chronology terms. To sum up this issue, the latest pottery and the latest ^{14}C date from the 'brown earth accumulation' point to the 10th/9th century BCE.

The 'Large Stone Structure'

As mentioned above, the assumption that the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' are all segments of a single monumental structure forms the basis of Mazar's stratigraphical and chronological analysis. Mazar's dating of the 'Large Stone Structure' to ca. 1000 BCE is based on her interpretation of the biblical text and three archaeological arguments:

- (1) It was built on top of the 'brown earth accumulation', the latest pottery of which dates to the Iron I.
- (2) The 'Large Stone Structure' and the 'Stepped Stone Structure' are in fact parts of a single architectural complex (E. Mazar 2007: 46, 64). The latter dates between the Iron I (pottery found by Kenyon under the terraces, located, in turn, under the 'Stepped Stone Structure'—Steiner 1994) and the 10th century (Shiloh's Stratum 14 pottery found according to Cahill [2003: 57–61, Fig. 1.13] in the earliest surface in a house built into the 'Stepped Stone Structure' on the slope).
- (3) Locus 47—a 25–70 cm narrow slot between walls in the northeastern section

of the excavated area—yielded large fragments of several late Iron IIA vessels, including a Black on Red juglet (E. Mazar 2006b: 14, Fig. 4; 2007: 66). Mazar interpreted the construction of this room as a second phase in the history of the building.

Regarding Argument 1 above, we have already shown that the latest sherds in the 'brown earth accumulation' under the building date as late as the 10th–9th century BCE (low chronology; late 11th–9th century according to the conventional chronology); and that it seems that this is not an *in situ* accumulation but rather a fill-debris that was brought to this location from somewhere else on the crest of the ridge or its slope.

As for Argument 2, Mazar's interpretation, according to which the 'Stepped Stone Structure' and the 'Large Stone Structure' belong to one Iron IIA complex, is based on circumstantial considerations that are open to alternative interpretations. Although the 'Large Stone Structure' reaches close to the top edge of the 'Stepped Stone Structure', no clear-cut, physical connection between the two structures has been established. Also, it is doubtful whether such a connection—if it existed at all—can be established, as the present top of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' seems to be a modern restoration. As will be discussed below, the 'Stepped Stone Structure' seems to represent more than one phase of construction, with its upper part probably dating to the Hellenistic period, if not later.

Regarding Argument 3—the late Iron IIA pottery in Locus 47—the following observations are pertinent:

- (A) It is difficult to establish the date of the walls in the northeastern sector of the excavated area (see below).
- (B) With no floor in Locus 47, it is difficult to establish whether the Iron IIA pottery found there belongs to the original room ('Room C'). The picture of this location (*ibid.*, photograph on p. 61, right) seems to indicate that the relevant vessels were found mixed with pottery rubble. The fact that they are all broken (two 'half' bowls, one 'third' of a bowl, a fragment of a krater, a 'quarter' or 'third' of a jug and about 'half' of a juglet) is a clear indication that they were *not* found *in situ*. Significantly, the excavator herself doubts whether the pottery in Locus 47 was found *in situ*, and suggests that it is part of a fill that had been brought here from elsewhere: "The state of preservation of the vessels suggests that they were at some nearby location prior to the construction of W22 and W24, and somehow were deposited at this spot when the walls were built" (*ibid.*: 61).
- (C) The upper part of the same locus (Locus 47) yielded Iron IIB pottery (*ibid.*: 61, n. 121; Fig. on p. 70, nos. 6, 7, 10). The basket numbers from this place apparently disclose that at least one Iron IIB item (Fig. on p. 70, no. 7, Basket 678/53) was found under four (of the seven) Iron IIA items (from Basket 661)! The

division between lower Iron IIA and higher Iron IIB material within Locus 47 is therefore questionable, and so is the idea that this is an *in situ* assemblage.

- (D) Iron IIA pottery was found *under* two elements in nearby Room B (*ibid.*: 61).
- (E) A bone found in Locus 47 was radiocarbon dated to 2725±70 BP. According to our calculation (the numbers in E. Mazar 2007: 62, n. 124 are confused) the 1 σ calibrated date is 930–800 BCE (67.4%).

To sum up this point, the Iron IIA pottery in Locus 47 cannot be used to date the surrounding walls.

On the other hand there are strong indications that some or all parts of the ‘Large Stone Structure’ may have been built later than the Iron IIA:

- (1) Much activity took place in this general area during the Iron IIB. Macalister and Duncan published typical pottery, *lmlk* seal impressions, figurines and even a Hebrew ostrakon dating from this period, all of which were uncovered in their excavations (Macalister and Duncan 1926: 179–191, Pls. XIX–XX). Their finds fit the situation in other parts of the City of David, where the Iron IIB period is well represented, including Shiloh’s Area G immediately to the east of the area under discussion (Shiloh 1984: 4) and the so-called ‘Ophel’ area to the south of the Temple Mount (E. Mazar and B. Mazar 1989). The Iron IIB period is hardly represented in Mazar’s excavations, but this could have been the result of the clearing of this area by Macalister and Duncan (or in antiquity, by the builders of the ‘Large Stone Structure’—see below).
- (2) Several of Mazar’s finds indicate the possibility that walls of the ‘Large Stone Structure’ were built in post-Iron Age times: A late Iron II bulla was found “tucked away among the masonry of the Large Stone Structure” (E. Mazar 2007: 19); Herodian pottery was found between and under some of the boulders that covered the ‘Large Stone Structure’ (*ibid.*: 56) and, in fact, the debris in the spaces between the walls yielded similar pottery. However, these finds could have reached these places as the result of back-filling activities by Macalister and Duncan.
- (3) The walls of the Hasmonaean ritual bath (*mikveh*) and Wall 107 of the ‘Large Stone Structure’ were built in the same orientation and approximately at the same elevation, including the bottom level of their foundations (compare plans Fig. 1 and *ibid.*: 73).
- (4) A Byzantine wall was built on a flattened part of a wall which, according to Mazar, belongs to the ‘Large Stone Structure’ (see photograph in *ibid.*: 31).

The ‘Stepped Stone Structure’

Before continuing, we must take a closer, fresh look at the ‘Stepped Stone Structure’. A discussion of its nature and date is relevant for understanding the nature and date

of the walls unearthed on the crest of the ridge to its west. Various structural elements have been associated with the 'Stepped Stone Structure', having been uncovered in several excavations and analyzed by various scholars. A. Mazar has divided the 'Stepped Stone Structure' into five 'components' (2006: 257–259) and for the sake of convenience we shall use his division (Fig. 2). Here we are concerned in the main with his 'Component 2', that is, the 'Stepped Stone Mantle'—defined as the "mantle wall" by several scholars (see *ibid.*: 258)—extending over the upper part of the slope and reaching the city-wall located at the top. The 'Stepped Stone Mantle' of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' extends above a system of terraces ('Component 1') whose structural relationship to the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' and their date do not concern us here. Further remains uncovered by Kenyon in her Trench I, and defined by A. Mazar as 'Components 3, 4 and 5', are not physically connected to 'Components 1 and 2', and are different in character. Their relationship to Components 1 and 2 is not clear.

The common view assumes that the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' ('Component 2') had been erected in a single construction effort, not later than the Iron IIA, and was in use for a long period. A fresh examination by us in the field and a reassessment of the published data lead us to conclude that there are significant structural differences between the lower and upper parts of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle', and that it represents more than one phase of building activity. The recurrent need for a revetment in this spot was first observed by Duncan, who discovered a fissure in the rock scarp: "The hollow or fissure referred to is filled up with great boulders, as far inwards as I could see, and for a considerable distance under the foundations of the great Jebusite Eastern Rampart" (in Macalister and Duncan 1926: 52).

The different phases in the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' are evident in the size of the stone blocks used for construction (see Fig. 3; E. Mazar 2007: photograph on p. 45). The blocks in the lower courses are significantly smaller than those in the upper third of the structure. Such arrangement negates the ordinary method of constructing retaining walls, which regularly consist of larger stone blocks at the bottom and smaller ones at the top.³ The orientation of the two parts also differs: The lower courses, of smaller stone blocks (uncovered by Shiloh 1984: Fig. 16, Pl. 29: 1), run in a south-north orientation, while the upper courses are oriented towards the northwest.

Two pieces of information possibly indicate the date of the lower part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle'. First, the latest sherds retrieved from between the stones in 'Components 3, 4 and 5' date to the Iron IIA (Steiner 1994: 19; 2001: 50; 2003: 358). However, as the connection of these structures to the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' is not firmly established, this datum should be used with reservation. Second, Iron II houses were built over the lower part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle'. Cahill argued

³ See the retaining wall of the stairwell of the Tel Beersheba water-system (Herzog 2002: 92).

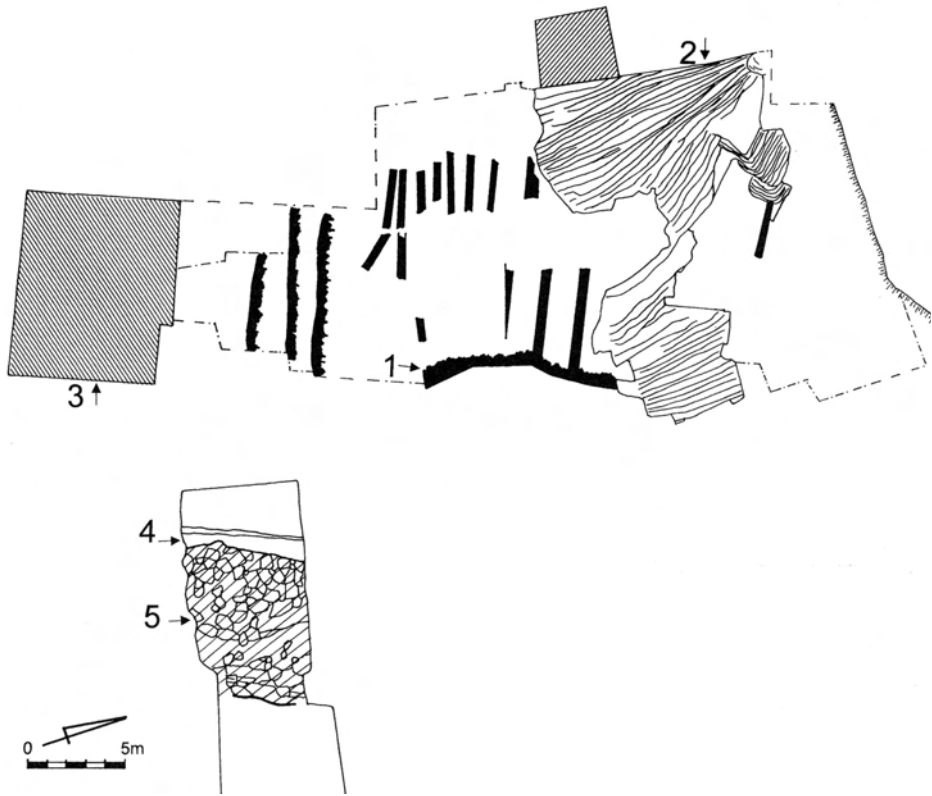


Fig. 2. Schematic plan of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' with numbers of 'Components 1–5' marked (after A. Mazar 2006: Fig. 1).

that pottery from Shiloh's Strata 14 and 13 (10th and 9th century BCE according to the traditional dating system) was found on the two lower floor levels in the 'Burnt Room House' which was built over the 'Stepped Stone Structure' (Cahill 2003: 56–66; Figs. 1.11–1.14). Yet, only sherds, rather than complete vessels, were uncovered here, and they are registered as originating from ten different loci. Quite possibly, the sherds described by Cahill are associated with fills supporting the 'upper' floors of the 'Burnt Room House' (which was built on a steep slope) rather than with earlier, lower floors. It is noteworthy that neither Kenyon nor Shiloh observed any 10th or 9th century occupational layers in these houses, and that they both dated them to the second half of the 7th century (Kenyon 1974: 137; Shiloh 1984: 28). To sum up this issue, the lower part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' could have been built in a later phase of the Iron IIA (pottery of this period was found nearby between the stone courses in walls of 'Components 3, 4 and 5') or the early phase of the Iron IIB (before the construction of the 'Burnt Room House' in the late Iron II). In both 'low

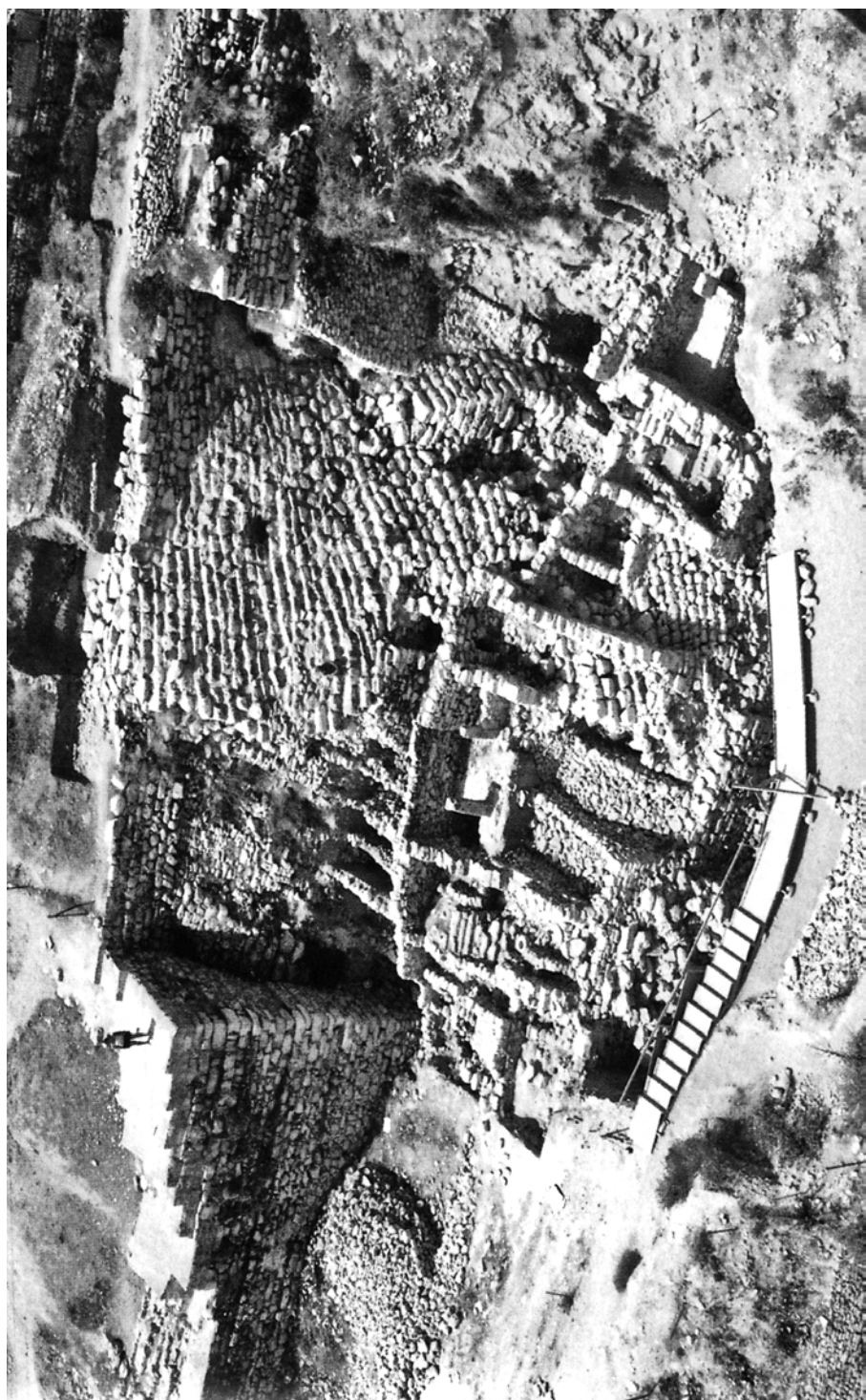


Fig. 3. Aerial view of the 'Stepped Stone Structure'. Note differences in the size of the blocks and orientation between the lower and upper courses.

chronology' and 'modified conventional chronology' (A. Mazar 2005) terms this means the 9th–8th centuries BCE.

Regarding the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle', it seems that its upper courses are incorporated into the late Hellenistic, Hasmonaean city-wall. In other words, it must have been constructed—or at least rebuilt—in the late Hellenistic period. This date was originally suggested by Kenyon (1974: 192–194). Shiloh also observed the association of the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' with the Hellenistic fortification system: "the line of the 'First Wall' and its towers integrated the top of the stepped stone structure..." (Shiloh 1984: 30). Most likely the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle' was built (or rebuilt) in order to stabilize the slope and support the city-wall; the entire slope was then covered by a thick earthen glacis (*ibid.*: 20–21, Figs. 17, 28).⁴

DISCUSSION

With the absence of floors, and taking into consideration constructional changes in the Roman and Byzantine periods and disturbances as a result of modern research, the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' cannot be accurately dated. The straightforward archaeological data indicate only that these walls should be dated to after the latest pottery in the 'brown earth accumulation' (late Iron I/early Iron IIA) and before the Herodian period (the date of the vaulted chamber built over and incorporated into Wall 107). In the Persian and early Hellenistic periods activity in the entire City of David was sparse and most of it was concentrated to the south of this spot (Finkelstein forthcoming). Three options for the construction of the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' should therefore be considered: the Iron IIA, the Iron IIB and late Hellenistic (Hasmonaean) period.

One can argue—with Eilat Mazar—that the original 'Stepped Stone Structure' (more accurately termed above as 'Stepped Stone Mantle') was constructed in order to support the slope and prepare for the construction of the 'Large Stone Structure'. The large building blocks and the proto-Ionic capital found by Kenyon at the bottom of her Square A XVIII immediately to the east of the 'Large Stone Structure' and to the north of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' (Kenyon 1963: 16, Pl. VIIIB) could have collapsed from the building on the crest of the ridge (E. Mazar 2007: 54).

Yet, dating all the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' to the Iron IIA raises serious difficulties, all presented above: a late Iron II bulla was found between stones of one wall; Early Roman pottery was found between and under its boulders and in the spaces between the walls; a Hasmonaean ritual bath (*mikveh*) was built in

⁴ The upper, flat top of the 'Stepped Stone Mantle', if not a modern reconstruction, seems to cover the city-wall (see Fig. 3; E. Mazar 2007: 45). If this is the case, it should be dated to post-Hellenistic times.

the same orientation and elevation as the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure'; a Byzantine wall was built directly on top of a wall of the 'Large Stone Structure'. Each of these problems can be explained away individually, mainly as resulting from the severe damage inflicted on this area in Roman and later periods and by modern researchers; as a *set* of difficulties, however, they cannot be easily dismissed.

Dating the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' to the Iron IIB would not resolve the problems listed above. In fact, this option would add another obstacle—the nearly total absence of Iron IIB finds, even in isolated pockets, in Mazar's excavations.

This leaves us with the third alternative, according to which the walls of the 'Large Stone Structure' were built in the Hellenistic period. But first one needs to examine whether the elements uncovered by Mazar indeed belong to a single structure.

The plan of the 'Large Stone Structure' consists of three distinguishable elements (Fig. 1): Two described by Mazar as one feature (Wall 107), forming the northern end of the building, and one labelled Wall 20, marking its eastern end. As far as we can judge, Wall 107 in fact represents two separate structures: a well-built western part and flimsy remains on the eastern side of the area. The two could not have belonged to a single building (Figs. 1, 4; see also photograph in E. Mazar 2007: 17). The western part of Wall 107 is built in a straight line, and is made of carefully laid large stone blocks, mostly placed as headers along the face of the wall. The eastern part of Wall 107 is constructed with less care, forming a winding line that runs diagonal to the western part of the wall. It is built of smaller stone blocks, mostly laid with their long side along the face of the wall. The single place that allegedly presents the full width of the wall looks like a heap of stones rather than a carefully built wall. Indeed, the two 'faces' of this section are not parallel. Moreover, a few stones in the eastern part of Wall 107 were placed *above* the northeastern corner of Wall 106 of the large cistern dated by Mazar to the 'Second Temple Period' (*ibid.*: photograph on page 74).

Wall 20 of the suggested 'Large Stone Structure' (Fig. 1) is clearly part of the late Hellenistic, Hasmonaeen city-wall (also *ibid.*, plan on p. 73). In Mazar's opinion, the wall had originally been constructed in the Iron IIA—when it was connected to the 'Stepped Stone Structure'—and reused in the late Hellenistic period. As we argued above, the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Structure' should be assigned to the late Hellenistic period, and thus the assumption that Wall 20 had originally been built in the Iron Age IIA cannot be proven.

The well-built western section of Wall 107 is evidently part of a large structure. An examination of the plans of the lowest remains recorded by Macalister and Duncan in this area (1926: Pl. V) reveals the presence of a thick wall running from east to west, parallel and to the south of the western section of Wall 107. It was labelled by them the 'Inner Wall' and was attributed to the 'Jebusite Stratum' (Fig. 6).



Fig. 4. General view of excavation area, looking east. Note the carefully built western section of Wall 107 and the flimsy eastern section, oriented diagonally to the former (courtesy of E. Mazar; after E. Mazar 2007: 57).

When the 'Inner Wall' and the western section of Wall 107 are drawn together they form a rectangular structure, with a possible entrance in the southern side (Fig. 6).

An additional unit that seems to belong to this structure is the ritual bath (*mikveh*). This structure too was first exposed by Macalister and Duncan, and assigned by them to the 'Hebrew Stratum' (1926: Pl. VI). Both the orientation and level of the walls (including foundations) of the ritual bath perfectly fit the plan of the western part of Wall 107 and should probably be attributed to the same layer (Fig. 6).

Figs. 5–6 show the above three elements restored as a single building. The possible date of this building in the late Hellenistic period is indicated by the Alexander Jannaeus coins found in the walls of the ritual bath. Other elements in this area that should be attributed to this phase of construction are the city-wall with the two towers extending along the eastern edge of the ridge, and the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Structure'. All these elements—the rectangular building with the ritual bath, the city-wall and the upper part of the 'Stepped Stone Structure'—make one coherent plan (Fig. 6).

Dating the main construction operation in this area to the late Hellenistic (Hasmonaeen) period would eliminate all the difficulties raised above: The later finds, including the Early Roman pottery found in the spaces between the walls, would comply with this dating. This option may also supply a partial explanation for the absence of Iron IIB remains in Mazar's excavations: These remains had been removed in preparation for construction in the Hellenistic period. It also explains why the rectangular building in the west seems to be incorporated (through a set of walls) with a segment of the Hasmonaeen city-wall in the east.

Ostensibly, a late Hellenistic option for the dating of these elements faces two difficulties:

- (1) The construction method of Wall 107 is somewhat different from that of the city-wall. This can be explained as representing the different functions of the two elements.
- (2) The entire history of this part of the City of David in the Bronze and Iron Ages would be reduced to an accumulation of less than one metre (the 'brown earth accumulation'). But this is not a unique case in the City of David. Structural remains of the Bronze and Iron Ages have completely been eradicated in other locations, such as Kenyon's Site K (1965: 14), Shiloh's Area K (Ariel and Magness 1992), and the area excavated by Crowfoot in the Tyropoeon Valley (Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929: 7–58) as interpreted by Ussishkin (2006: 154–159).

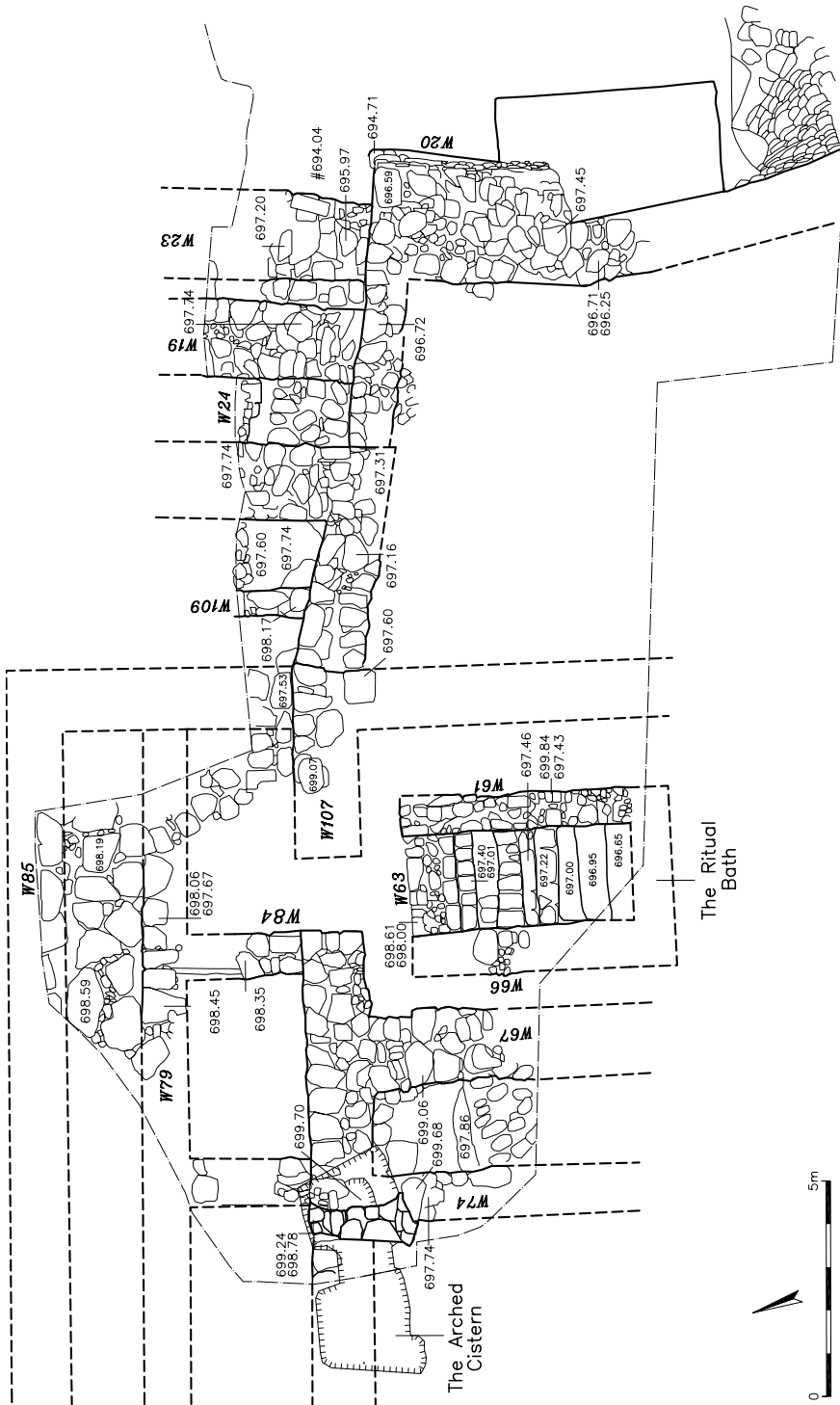


Fig. 5. Alternative interpretation of the 'Large Stone Structure' and other remains (prepared by Ze'ev Herzog).

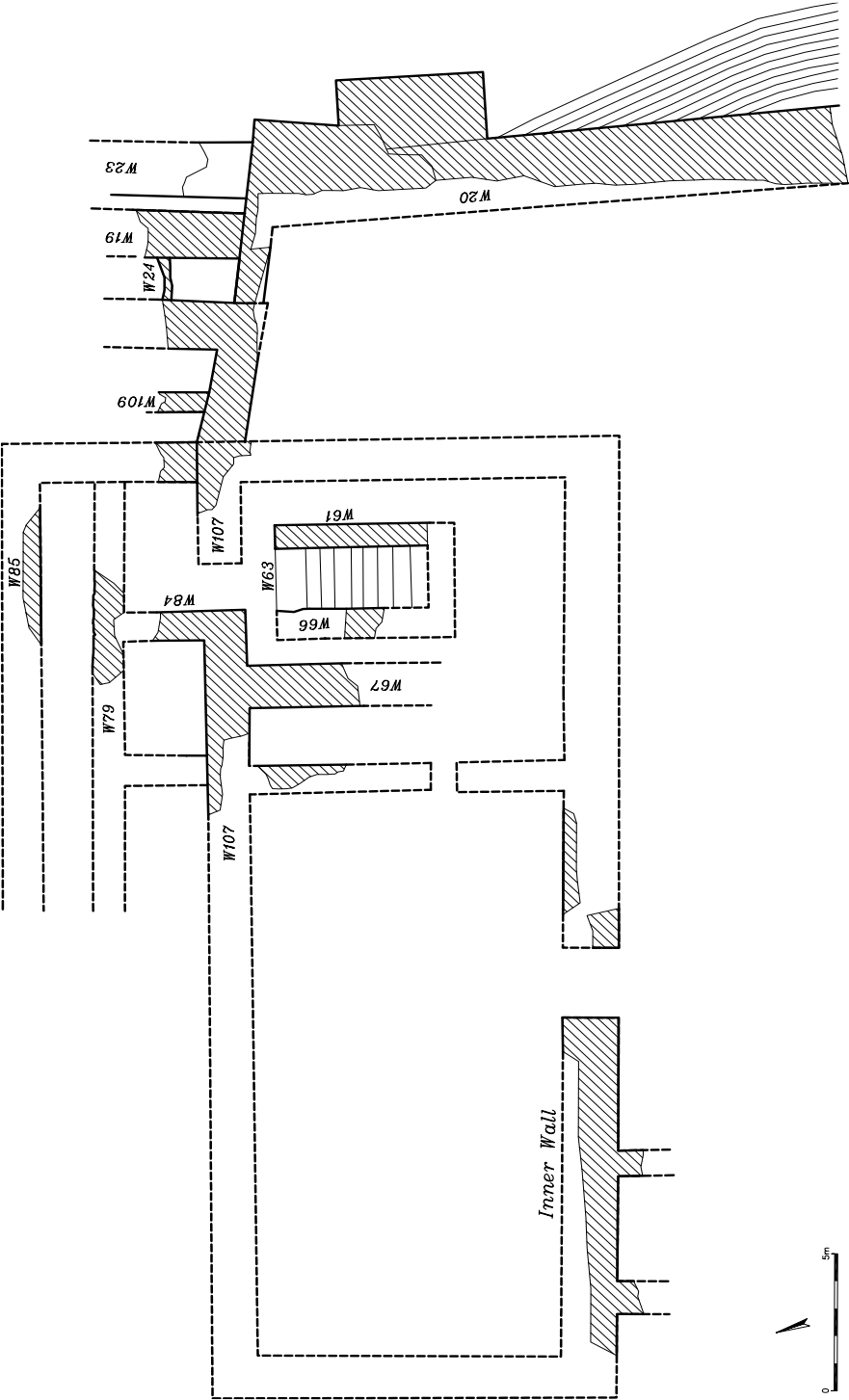


Fig. 6. Suggested reconstruction of the remains, including the 'Inner Wall' excavated by Macalister and Duncan (prepared by Ze'ev Herzog).

EILAT MAZAR'S 'HISTORICAL' INTERPRETATION

Though historical interpretation is not the goal of this article, it is worth citing Mazar's arguments, because they illuminate her views on biblical archaeology and biblical history and provide the background for her interpretation of the above-discussed remains—their function and their date.

Mazar follows two principles: (1) Biblical data are accepted without criticism as the basis for archaeological interpretation; (2) Therefore, biblical information takes precedence over archaeological data. Mazar's discussion of the "Solomonic city-wall" in the so-called 'Ophel' area to the south of the Temple Mount (E. Mazar 2006c) is a case in point. As she admits, the chronological data recovered in her excavations indicate that the *sole* Iron Age fortification system extending in this area was in use during the 8th–7th centuries BCE. However, according to the biblical sources the Solomonic city-wall must have passed here, hence the fortification system in question must be Solomonic in date.

Turning back to the area of the 'Large Stone Structure' we see that Mazar reads the biblical references to Jerusalem in a sequential, literal way. Ignoring 30 years of research on the Book of Genesis and the patriarchal narratives (e.g., Van Seters 1975; Thompson 1974), she interprets Genesis as reflecting Middle Bronze Age realities, referring to Melchizedek king of Salem (Genesis 14: 18, a late, probably post-exilic source—e.g., Gunkel 1901: 288–290; Astour 1966: 67–74; Van Seters 1975: 119–120; Soggin 1995; Carr 1996: 163–166) as the king of Middle Bronze Jerusalem (E. Mazar 2007: 14). Disregarding decades of research on the Conquest traditions (e.g., Noth 1938; Alt 1939; Weippert 1971; Van Seters 1990; Na'aman 1994) Mazar reads the Deuteronomistic Book of Joshua as an early account of the conquest of Canaan. She therefore dates Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem of Joshua 10: 1 to the Late Bronze Age (E. Mazar 2007: 14, 37). In her opinion, Jerusalem does not appear in the detailed description of the conquest of the Shephelah and the southern highlands (Joshua 10) because its huge Middle Bronze fortifications, which continued to be in use in the Late Bronze Age, deterred Joshua from assaulting the city (*ibid.*: 37; we should note that there is no clue in the archaeological record for a Late Bronze reuse of the Middle Bronze fortification).

Mazar proposes reading the story of the conquest of Jerusalem by the tribe of Judah in Judges 1: 8, "after the death of Joshua", against an Iron I background (*ibid.*: 37, n. 71). Traces of fire in one spot (under Room B of the 'Large Stone Structure') should, in her opinion, be associated with this tradition (*ibid.*: 47–48). "The Jebusite city conquered by King David was strong and well-fortified. Although no considerable architectural remains that can be confidently attributed to this period ... have been uncovered, the biblical descriptions in 2 Samuel 5: 6–9 and 1 Chronicles 11: 4–7 accord with what we know of Jerusalem in previous periods—an important capital city surrounded by

massive fortifications". After "his takeover David let the city's king ... and inhabitants live (1 Chronicles 11: 4–8), and even hastened to incorporate them into his regime, as indicated by the story of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's warriors..." (E. Mazar 2007: 44–45). The latter two citations are most telling for Mazar's method, as indicated above: there is no archaeological evidence, but the biblical story, including references to the 4th century BCE Book of Chronicles, is sufficient for historical reconstruction of events that ostensibly took place ca. 1000 BCE.⁵

Mazar was driven to dig in this spot by the idea that the palace of King David must have been located here (E. Mazar 1997; 2007: 7–8). She follows 2 Samuel 5: 11, according to which the artisans of Hiram king of Tyre built a palace for King David. She identifies the location of the palace according to 2 Samuel 5: 17 (E. Mazar 2006a: 18–20; 2007: 52): "When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up in search of David; but David heard of it and went down to the stronghold". Mazar believes (following Macalister and Duncan 1926: 15) that the Bronze Age city was located further south on the ridge of the City of David (E. Mazar 2006b: 12; 2006d; 2007: 16–17, 28); "It appears as though David was residing in his new palace at the time of the Philistine attack, and thus was forced to leave the palace and go down to the fortress, where he would have felt more protected. It follows that the city fortress stood to the south of the palace. Since it can be reasonably assumed that this fortress had been built at the northern edge of the Canaanite city ... the new palace, consequently, must have been built just to the outside of the city wall" (E. Mazar 2007: 52; also 2006a: 18–20). As we have already shown, there is no archaeological or topographical evidence to support the view that the Bronze Age stronghold was restricted to the southern part of the ridge. This settlement could have included the area excavated by Mazar, and even areas further to the north. And needless to say, we do not accept such a literal reading of 2 Samuel 5: 17.

SUMMARY

Eilat Mazar's excavations in the City of David add several points of information to what we know about the history of this problematic site. Yet, the main find—the 'Large Stone Structure'—was not properly interpreted and dated. First, it seems to consist of several elements, mainly a rectangular building in the west and the city-wall in the east. Second, all one can safely say is that its various elements post-date the late Iron I/early Iron IIA and predate the Roman period. Circumstantial evidence seems to suggest the dating of most elements to the late Hellenistic period.

⁵ Elsewhere Mazar (2007: 19, 64) uses toponyms mentioned in Nehemiah 3 to identify buildings in 10th century BCE Jerusalem.

Beyond archaeology, one wonders about the interpretation of the finds. The biblical text dominates this field operation, not archaeology. Had it not been for Mazar's literal reading of the biblical text, she never would have dated the remains to the 10th century BCE with such confidence. This is an excellent example of the weakness of the traditional, highly literal, biblical archaeology—a discipline that dominated research until the 1960s, that was weakened and almost disappeared from the scene in the later years of the 20th century, and that reemerged with all its attributes in the City of David in 2005.

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